



Montgomery County Council

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Focus on Protecting Pedestrians, Seniors, Schoolchildren...

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COUNCILMEMBERS PROMOTE BILL TO REQUIRE SHOVELING OF ICE AND SNOW FROM COUNTY SIDEWALKS

Montgomery County would join the list of local jurisdictions requiring homeowners to shovel ice and snow from their sidewalks under legislation introduced today in the County Council.

The "Pedestrian Winter Safety Act of 2001," introduced by Councilmember Phil Andrews and co-sponsored by Councilmembers Isiah Leggett and Steve Silverman, would require County residents to clear snow and ice from their sidewalks within 24 hours of the end of a snowfall. Current County law requires snow shoveling only for commercial properties and multi-family residential properties.

"Pedestrian safety is a growing problem in our County and is an even worse problem when sidewalks filled with snow and ice force our schoolchildren to walk in the street and force our seniors and disabled to stay indoors altogether," said Councilmember Andrews, who chairs the Public Safety Committee.

"Most folks in the County already clear their walks. For those who don't, here's an incentive to pitch in."

Joining Councilmembers Andrews and Leggett at today's news conference were leaders from the senior, environmental, transit, and disabilities communities, as well as a middle school principal and County PTA activists. The Montgomery County Council of PTAs backs the legislation.

(more...)

page two

The legislation is similar to residential snow-shoveling requirements already in effect in County municipalities such as Rockville, Gaithersburg, Takoma Park, Kensington, Poolesville, and Chevy Chase Village. Similar requirements also exist in Prince George's County, Howard County, the City of Frederick, the District of Columbia, and Alexandria, Virginia.

The bill would require a written warning about a violation before imposing a \$50 civil fine if, within 24 hours after the warning, the situation is not corrected. It provides that single-family-home violators could be fined only once during a given snowfall or ice incident. Violations on commercial and multifamily properties would still be treated as separate violations for each day that a violation continues.

In addition, the bill would make it a violation to pile snow in handicapped parking spaces. Such an action would be a Class B violation, with fines up to \$100 for the first offense and \$150 for subsequent offenses.

"It is already difficult to keep others from parking in those few spaces set aside for handicapped persons' cars," said Councilmember Leggett, who authored that piece of the bill. "It is equally important that people be prevented from obstructing these spaces by storing snow or other debris in them."

Community leaders chimed in to support the measure.

"Our school is on Bel Pre Road and Bel Pre Road is heavily traveled," said Judy Docca, principal at Argyle Middle School. "We have 300 children who walk to school and, when sidewalks are not clear, they have to walk in the street – just as they had to do yesterday and have to do today."

"Last year, when we had the big snowfall, our students at Eastern Middle School were looking like they were crossing the northwest face of Mount Everest instead of County sidewalks," said Peter Lafen, president of the Eastern Middle School PTSA. "Plus, those who use transit depend on cleared sidewalks as a vital link to get to and from work."

"I'm here as a mom," said Lorraine Driscoll of Bethesda. "Whenever there's a big snow, my daughter has to walk to and from school in the street. I'm very frightened that something could happen."

"For those of us in the disabled community, unshoveled sidewalks and snow piled in handicapped parking spaces can make our lives difficult or almost impossible," said Cynthia Buddington, who serves on the County's Commission on People with Disabilities.

(more...)

page three

The legislation would repeal the current law providing for the Police Department to enforce the shoveling requirement and allow the County Executive to designate an enforcement agency or agencies. The bill also allows the County Executive to order a different deadline or different requirements if conditions warrant.

Other provisions allow the use of sand, salt, or other abrasives if ice or hardpacked snow are unreasonably difficult to remove and an additional 24 hours to clear walkways if a snowplow redeposits snow or ice on a sidewalk. It would allow the County to clear the snow and ice and charge the responsible property owner for the cost when necessary.

A public hearing on the legislation will be held on Tuesday, February 13 at 7:30 PM at the County Council Building, 100 Maryland Avenue in Rockville.

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